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Facade of a Romantic: Benjamin Disraeli and Coningsby or the New Generation, Sybil or the Two Nations, and Tancred or the New Crusade

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Facade of a Romantic:
Benjamin Disraeli and *Coningsby or the New Generation*, *Sybil or the Two Nations*, and
Tancred or the New Crusade

BY

Peggy Pope

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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2003

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Abstract

Dismissed by contemporary critics as a second-rate writer, Benjamin Disraeli has been undervalued for over a hundred and fifty years. Writing in 1979, D.R. Schwarz rued that no recent full-length study of his novels had been undertaken, while other, even more minor novelists have been regularly exhumed. A substantial reassessment may be underway, as Paul Smith notes, particularly in the area of Disraeli's Jewishness. Bernard Glassman's volume, *Benjamin Disraeli: The Fabricated Jew in Myth and Memory* (2003), and *Disraeli's Jewishness* (2002), by Todd Endelman and Tony Kushner, attest to this new interest. A recent general study, *Disraeli* (2000), by Edgar Feuchtwanger, and a history of the political novel, *The Centre of Things: Political Fiction in Britain from Disraeli to the Present* (1991), by Christopher Harvie, have also been published. Except for the latter, which retains a barbed view of Disraeli's motives, the censorious tone of much earlier scholarship has disappeared in favor of interest in Disraeli's ideas. Smith's own book, *A Brief Life* (1996), promises such a re-interpretation.

In the throes of industrialization, capitalism, and Utilitarianism, the Victorian era looked askance at vestiges of romanticism which lingered in its midst. Alienated from this "prevailing ethos" (Feuchtwanger ix), undoubtedly tainted as well by anti-Semitism, Disraeli was subsequently given short shrift. Labeled as an overcharged romantic, with good reason based on his first six novels, critics failed to notice what of antithesis to the romantic existed in his political trilogy. Though later scholars note his esoteric conception of the political and social scene, it has generally been with scorn rather than serious consideration. They have noticed only in passing that his romanticism contains humor and social critique. Only D.R. Schwarz detects any progression in Disraeli's protagonists, and even he fails to see that, while retaining qualities of the romantic hero, they subtly undermine the status quo. For despite Disraeli's dyed-in-the-wool

romanticism, he cannot avoid reacting to the real world confronting him, and this necessitates involving his protagonists in challenges from entrenched elites as well as from the emergent working and middle classes. Disraeli's ideas in working out these challenges, romantically colored as they are, deserve to be reconsidered, to maintain an awareness, first, that the road taken by the modern industrial state had its detractors, and, second, that dissent to the prevailing view always—and validly—exists.

Introduction

Disraeli came by his romanticism honestly. His father knew Byron, they had dined together, and Byron reputedly admired one of his father's books. While traveling across Switzerland in 1826, Disraeli happened across Maurice, who had rowed Byron on Lake Geneva during the storm later featured in *Childe Harold* (Blake 51). When he then met Byron's former gondolier, Tita, who had been with Byron at his death at Missolonghi, Disraeli immediately dispatched him to Bradenham to become part of his father's household (52); many years later, he would arrange through Queen Victoria for an annuity for Tita's widow (Monypenny 388). Disraeli's fascination for Byron never waned. Donald Stone writes that while Disraeli, like most Victorians—to paraphrase the Carlyle line—opened their Goethe, unlike them, Disraeli never closed his Byron (78).

Disraeli was twenty-six in 1830, the commonly acknowledged demarcation line between the Romantic and the Victorian periods; thus by the time he introduced the first political novel in 1844, he had perforce not only imbibed Byron in his youth but had become familiar with the social and political realities of England in the "Hungry Forties." Disraeli was placed by his affirmed romanticism in the uncomfortable position of balancing romantic sensibilities with a general Victorian reaction against them. Indeed, the reaction against romanticism had begun as early as the late seventeenth century with the development of the novel (Watt 11). Disraeli's novels confirm a lingering presence of that much-maligned strain, and Disraeli stubbornly cast his fictional heroes according to traits of the romantic in the face of a persistent reality. The process of dislodging romance was underway, however, even in the works of this holdout to romantic tradition. His heroes are beset from without by the bourgeoisie, the radicals, and the workers, and from within by the corruption of their fellow members of the aristocracy. The confrontation between these factions, with government and the Church thrown into the fray, provides

the setting for Disraeli's political trilogy of the 1840s. These works exhibit a progressive accommodation of Disraeli's romantic ideals to political realities.

Disraeli is credited with creating the political novel by a host of writers as various as Isaiah Berlin, in *Against the Current*; Louis Cazamian, in *The Social Novel in England*; and Disraeli's co-biographers, William Flavelle Monypenny and George Buckle. Monypenny attributes the writing of the novels to Disraeli's exclusion in 1841 from the cabinet of William Peel (595). Prompted by both unfulfilled ambition and overwhelming debt, Disraeli proceeded to write three novels in the next six years which became the Young England trilogy. *Coningsby or the New Generation* came out in 1844; *Sybil or the Two Nations* followed a year later; and *Tancred or the New Crusade* was published in 1847. Both *Coningsby* and *Sybil* sold 3,000 copies each and *Tancred* would sell 2,250 (Blake 192-3), moderate figures considering the 30,000 copies that Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* would sell in 1865. Though some sources characterize them as wildly popular, biographer Robert Blake, whose work on Disraeli is accorded premier place by Richard Levine (176), admits that the books were not best-sellers and never appealed to the middle classes (192). Walter Bagehot testifies that Disraeli was virtually unknown ten miles from London (295). Evidently, "Tories read no books," according to biographer Sydney Weintraub, but for Disraeli this may have been a good thing (xii); due to their tone, much of the backbencher squirearchy would not have appreciated the slights aimed their way.

Although sales figures admittedly are not a reliable gauge of ability, the common assessment of Disraeli's work deems it inferior to that of the first rank of Victorian novelists. Foremost among factors for this judgment, Blake confesses, is that Disraeli is "too slapdash, too limited in his sympathies, too fond of verbal extravagances and absurd plots" (190); but several other factors contribute to this judgment. The large dose of

historical and political exegesis contained in the works would be enough to alienate many readers, a fact which Disraeli realizes and addresses facetiously in *Coningsby* when an old Tory member bemoans understanding the novel conceptions of the New Generation due to its “devilish deal of history” (410-1). Paul Smith cites the relegation of *Sybil* to the status of “neglected masterpiece” because it depends on the reader’s knowledge of Chartism and party politics (106); and Leslie Stephen supports this contention in his *Hours in a Library*, when he writes that *Coningsby* “wants little but a greater absence of purpose to be a first-rate novel” (Bloomfield 25). Thom Braun observes a lack of restraint in *Coningsby* as the “paramount feature of the novel and . . . a presentiment of his limitations as a novelist” (10); but he follows that by remarking an off-setting enthusiasm that conveys a zest for it all. Similar to Dickens’ Veneerings in *Our Mutual Friend*, Disraeli’s characters thrive on the political environment, dashing about town canvassing support, speculating who’s in and who’s out, comparing notes on the numbers for the majority and against; but Disraeli did it twenty-one years earlier than Dickens, and Blake asserts that “Disraeli was better than any other Victorian novelist at portraying the aristocracy” (216).

Speare writes of additional challenges that face the writer of political novels: he must represent a “philosophy of politics . . . in a legitimately artistic manner, and ensure that the result is not. . . a creed disguised in the garments of a novel . . .” (26); unfortunately Disraeli is not exempt from this charge: his stories and main characters do largely serve to provide a framework for his creed. On Speare’s additional criteria of “endowing his characters with warmth, color and vitality” (26), it also must be said that Disraeli can often be found wanting, Arthur Frietzsche determining that each of Disraeli’s heroes is the same stock figure who has appeared in the other novels (6-7).

Fortunately, this is not the case for many of the secondary characters, whose vivacity or deviousness, as the case may be, comes through clearly.

Another reason for Disraeli's subservient reputation to Eliot, Trollope, Dickens and Thackeray besides writing style has to do with reader expectation: neither wholehearted romance nor solely political treatise, the novels are a muddying of genre, an uneasy oscillation from romantic quest to political polemic. They waffle between idealism, didacticism and nostalgia. Not only this, but there was that negative connotation toward the romance, it having become a pejorative term to the Victorians, according to Michael McKeon (31). Additionally, Donald Greene finds the Victorians reacted against everything that hailed from the eighteenth century, not only in "normal rebellion of any generation" against its predecessor, but from a Victorian sense of inferiority in its propriety and decorum to that earlier century's exuberance (vi). It is in this very mix of genres, however, that the trilogy provides one of its greatest sources of interest. The novels of the trilogy may present a romantic façade, but underneath lurks a biting social critique.

Disraeli's works not only exhibit a combination of traditional romance plot and political treatise, but this combination is present in Disraeli's political life as well, where Donald Stone finds parliamentary members unamused by Disraeli's poetic license with truth, in his defense citing "The Decay of Lying" in which Oscar Wilde recognizes the "need to divert from reality in the name of something better" (77). An appreciation of Disraeli's political career can only be gained, according to Louis Cazamian, with a knowledge of his fiction (175). The three novels, in urging the ascendancy of the imagination over reason, reflect the attitude Disraeli would also attempt to apply to political affairs, an attempt which largely accounts for his controversial legacy, either reviled or esteemed. Robert Blake points out that because of his reliance on the irrational,

“The intellectuals detested him almost to a man” (506), and even the parliamentary backbenchers were, writes Paul Smith, bemused at Disraeli’s “flourishes” (112). The disjunction between belief and practical application (Braun 15), the collision of romanticism with the quotidian compromise required in Parliament, exacted a toll, however, for it was not easy for a “romantic hero of Byronic . . . proportions to bring himself to mundane . . . parliamentary factionalism,” as Edgar Feuchtwanger remarks (15). Paul Smith recognizes the exhaustion that came of working “through the parliament the representative character of which he had impugned and the party which had failed to promote him” (76). Disraeli was worn by the exertion, forced to admit, when he finally reached “the top of the greasy pole,” it had come too late (Maurois 285). His wife commented, when Disraeli reached high office, that “they [had] made him wait and drudge so long . . . now time is against him” (Masefield 307). As the mysterious Jewish sage, Sidonia, would exhort Coningsby, Genius is for Youth (144-5).

This wear and tear on Disraeli’s ideals is exhibited in the three novels of the trilogy. From the naïve optimism and promise of *Coningsby*, Disraeli is compelled to adopt a more sober outlook in *Sybil*; and by the time *Tancred* comes out, Disraeli has been forced to concede the intransigence of the political and social conditions of England and to take refuge in a mystic salvation, an impracticable “doctrine of theocratic equality” which relies only upon the “ready instrument in every human being” (291). The protagonists of these three novels exhibit a movement to disillusionment that D.R. Schwarz terms progressive dubiety (101-4). This movement from naiveté to maturity to ultimate disillusion also marks the progression that Lilian Furst observes from the certainties of the romantic hero to the later, more profound alienation of the anti-hero. Though an unregenerate romantic, Disraeli was forced to admit the puissance of practicality as he became more experienced.

Despite the number of critics who remark on Disraeli's imagination, no consensus exists even on this seemingly clear-cut assessment, for Walter Bagehot, the nineteenth-century essayist, contends "there probably never was a statesman so unoriginal . . . No politician has ever shown, in the bad sense of the word, so *romantic* a political imagination" (279), and in his attempts to reach some romantic ideal in politics, committed his most egregious gaffes. Even Blake agrees, explaining the paradox by distinguishing between imagination and what should be more truly called day-dreaming, for he unequivocally states, "The truth is that Disraeli lacked imagination" (219).

In Disraeli's formulation of English history—and it has been observed that Disraeli consistently referred to any concatenation of the body politic as England—many critics see a fatuous weave of the imagination, but Bagehot's judgment may yet hold water, for, as specious as most critics deem it, several commentators offer support for certain of his conceptions. Disraeli's view—propounded with "brilliant dash," Cazamian notes (181)—as merely a Whig interpretation, has been taken up by Herbert Butterfield and others; Donald Greene supports the theory that Whigs perpetuated a version which styled them as forward-looking and branded the Tories as backward (61); Linda Colley underscores the hegemony of the Whigs which dispossessed the Tories at this time (Smith 50); and Richard Kroll mentions that Walpole was denounced by many, including Swift and Pope, as ruthlessly consolidating power with his Whig party machine (7). Neither was Disraeli the lone voice that was pro-Bolingbroke and anti-Walpole—Kroll similarly remarks a lingering admiration for Bolingbroke's politics as reviving classical republican opposition to corruption, empire and luxury in favor of civic virtue (8). Both Greene and Niall Ferguson are among authors who recognize the system of debt introduced by William III that arose to finance wars (Greene 72, Ferguson 36). Disraeli's seemingly esoteric labeling of the English system as "Dutch financing" turns out to echo

common worries P.G.M. Dickson sees as having arisen over the national debt that had been incurred by continental wars, a debt that could endanger the secure footing of the country (Kroll 7). Further, the decline of party differences which Disraeli decries, Kroll ascribes to the changing political atmosphere after George III came to the throne (17), when, with the final quelling of the Jacobites and the succession question, violent debate between a Whig and Tory became a milder altercation between “Court and Country” (16). Thus, Disraeli’s exegesis, which is described by many critics as *outré*, proved to have a certain foundation, and if *sui generis*, is at least not a mad raving.

Disraeli’s concerns over materialism are certainly not misplaced, as Kroll finds the debate about commerce and ethics intensifying from the later eighteenth century (8). Disraeli represents that view J.G.A. Pocock presents of an agrarian-based society with virtue deriving from service to the polity, as opposed to the developing “oligarchic” early empire “whose relations . . . are mediated through the acquisition of things” (Kroll 9). The industrialization of the country and the rise of a consumer culture made such a concern as Disraeli exhibits in the trilogy extremely relevant.

Nor is Disraeli’s emphasis on the importance of race, variously sloughed off by critics such as Blake with a disclaimer as nonsense or used to validate anti-Semitic thought (Glassman 199), as outlandish as it seems when considered in its historical context. Blake writes that Disraeli’s “readers would not have regarded it as the nonsense we consider it today” (202). When Sidonia imparts to Coningsby the key that “All is race, there is no other truth” one need look no further than Alfred Milner to find an echo that English hegemony was the right of the English race. He believed in “the destiny of the English race. . . . My patriotism knows no geographical but only racial limits” (qtd. in Ferguson 248). Niall Ferguson also cites the rising issue of race in the British colonies, particularly noting the “liberalism of the center and the racism of the periphery” (195).

Possibly his greatest offense comes from touting the Jewish race, for J.H. Plumb notes that Disraeli rose to pre-eminence in an entrenched status-conscious society, “unthinkingly” anti-Semitic (x). Berlin attributes Disraeli’s romantic impulses to his reaction against his outsider status. His elaboration of the Jewish race as the acme of a hierarchy of race allows Disraeli to elbow his way imaginatively among the elite, where he can equal the peers of the realm. Disraeli’s imaginative solution, embodied in Sidonia, allows him to beat the aristocracy at their own status game. According to Berlin, such an outsider as Disraeli—dubbed the “The Alien Patriot” by E.T. Raymond—can compensate with a hyper-nationalism which can be transforming “when given a new cause . . . especially one . . . historically connected with real or imaginary past glories” (259). The protective device afforded by his invented persona, which Thom Braun labeled a “grandiose personal mythology,” gave Disraeli a sense of identity from which he “shook thrones and founded empires” (10-1).

That this consciously crafted identity could be perceived as a false identity (Berlin 272), was a perception that would dog Disraeli throughout his life. Even his colleagues in the Young England group were unsure what to make of Disraeli’s true convictions, Lord John Manners musing, “Could I only satisfy myself that D’Israeli believed all he said, I should be more happy: his historical views are quite mine, but does he believe them?” (Blake 175). Berlin is convinced, however, that though Disraeli was a performer, he was a performer who believed in his creation (266). The concerns about Disraeli’s sincerity in his beliefs seem unfounded when one refers to the body of Disraeli’s work. In both the earlier *The Voyage of Popanilla* (1828) and *The Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835), a political philosophy is set out which remained consistent throughout the trilogy and Disraeli’s career, leading Walter Sichel to remark that it reflected a “wonderful harmony of coherence (20). How—and if—that philosophy could feasibly be

incorporated into pragmatic policy is a different, and rather moot, question than its imaginative formulation.

For such a genre as the political novel to also be imbued with wit and satire seems particularly ironic given the often dry ground of political discussion. This aspect, though little remarked except in passing by commentators, is the most delightful aspect of Disraeli's work, a reward for the sometimes tediously saccharine bits. Disraeli's vignettes of society in the drawing room scenes of *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred* are fresh and lively, though, as Paul Bloomfield notes, Disraeli, always an admirer of the aristocracy, did not forego a critical eye toward their foibles. Though Disraeli loved aristocratic circles and, in Young England guise, was avid for the maintenance of their ruling elite, his novels contain a great deal more social criticism than at first meets the eye, buried amid the romance and the political sermonizing. In *Coningsby*, it is exhibited in the portraits of the political hangers-on, Tadpole and Taper who foreshadow Boots and Brewer in Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. In *Sybil*, Tadpole and Taper make another appearance, incessantly speculating on who's out and who's in, but Disraeli wittily depicts the game of political one-upmanship played between Egremont's mother, Lady Marney, and Lady St. Julians, who vie to be the first to be apprised of the King's impending death in order to position themselves with the likely beneficiaries. Disraeli's use of satire at moments can recall Pope's in portraying the dire significance accorded petty things by society, for instance in Sir Vavasour Firebraces's pestering of Egremont about baronetcies, referring to it as the Great Question of the Day. Disraeli's critique of utilitarianism in its reliance on statistics and their application to the new Poor Law anticipates Dickens' treatment of the topic in *Hard Times* (1854) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). In *Tancred*, Disraeli tweaks the religious hypocrisy of the Church, the scientific

doctrine of evolution, as well as the smug superiority of Englishmen transplanted to foreign climes.

The satire in these novels is a welcome respite from the romantic attributes of Coningsby, Egremont and Tancred, our three heroes, who wear thin quickly in their idealized trappings. Disraeli comes by his predilection for heroes honestly, Walter Houghton explaining that hero worship was a trait particularly rife in the nineteenth century and that no earlier age contained more emphasis on modeling the self after such figures (305). Thus, Disraeli endows them with the obligatory traits of the romantic hero, but this makes for a staleness in their characters which contrasts with the sparkling depiction of many of Disraeli's other characters. Their lack of verisimilitude is ironic since these characters were based on personages of Disraeli's own acquaintance; which brings to mind the accuracy of Bagehot's observation, for it is the romantic, imagined aspects of the novels which are their least attractive feature. In contrast, we have in the portraits of the Duchess of Bellamont or Lady St. Julians, for example, a sense of first-hand observation, and Bagehot's addendum to commentary on Disraeli is equally apropos: "Whether in fiction or debate, there are few who have drawn so many true and subtle sketches of those whom they have actually seen and known" (280). One experiences, however, an ennui of these protagonists.

Then one realizes that they function in the novel to illustrate the progressive impotence of the romantic hero. Though Sidonia hovers over each of the novels from an unchanging idealist aerie, an embodiment of Byron as a symbol of adventure, liberation, romance and mystery, the three protagonists are earth-bound. The "powers of action" Houghton identifies with the romantic hero (305) are siphoned off, leaving the three merely in possession of their sterling character. According to Muriel Masfield, Disraeli's heroes relied on a conviction of their capacity (306), perhaps ideally sufficient

but in practice—and in the trilogy—doomed. They passively wait in their heroic garb, but in *Coningsby*, it is the bourgeois industrialist who rises in importance, and action, to challenge the hegemony of the ruling class; indeed, it is this bourgeois who ensures Coningsby's fortune. In *Sybil*, it is the rise of the radicals in the shape of the publisher, Stephen Morley, and the workers, whose leader is Walter Gerard, which challenges the hero for power; and in *Tancred*, the impotence of the principled hero is opposed by the expedience of the incorrigible plot-devising "Young Syrian" politician, Fakredeen. In each case, the romantic is threatened by pressure from rising social groups or from the exigencies of rule. This succumbing of the ideal to the pragmatism of a new era is the ultimate lesson conveyed in the trilogy.

Coningsby

As noted in the introduction, *Coningsby* is a blend of political treatise, social critique and satire (not to speak of *roman à clef*) overlaid by the romantic quest of the hero for an answer to the political question, “What should be conserved?” (125). *Coningsby* would also be the *Bildungsroman* of the young Harry Coningsby—Smith would add of England itself (59)—for his development of the qualities necessary to turn him into an archetypal romantic hero. It would be if Coningsby required development to achieve these qualities. But from the moment we first meet him, we are left in no doubt that he already possesses the prerequisites, beginning with physical attractiveness, evidenced by a “countenance, radiant with health and the luster of innocence, . . . at the same time thoughtful and resolute” (32). Not only that, but, “The expression of his deep blue eye was serious. Without extreme regularity of features, [his] face was one that would never have passed unobserved. His short upper lip indicated a good breed; and his chestnut curls clustered over his open brow. . . . Add to this, a limber and graceful figure . . .” (32) and you have that personification of “innate, natural superiority” (Braun 19) which Lilian Furst, in romantic fiction finds in the romantic hero (42). As Frietzsche notes, each of Disraeli’s novels features a “bright, charming, ambitious young hero,” and Coningsby is certainly no different than Disraeli’s earlier heroes, Vivian Grey or Contarini Fleming, except Coningsby is more plausible than these two or the heroes of the other four earlier novels (6-7).

Coningsby exists, however, not as a particular individual, but as the generic embodiment of the ideal great leader. Disraeli’s aim was that of Carlyle’s, as Mark Girouard points out, to “produce a new model for the ruling classes” (260). Disraeli wrote, “I believe that everything that is great has been accomplished by great men” (Bloomfield 7) and Thomas Carlyle agreed, prescribing a “Hero-worship,” which could be attained by “being ourselves of heroic mind” (97).

The effects of such minds would, “radiate outward, irrepressible, into all that we touch and handle . . . kindling ever new light . . .” (97). Coningsby possesses such an heroic mind.

Eton provides the setting for further proof that Coningsby is a “paragon of heroic individualism” (Braun 19), with his “quick and brilliant apprehension . . . combined with a memory of rare retentiveness [which] had already advanced Coningsby far beyond his age, and made him already looked to as the future hero of the school” (71). Of course Coningsby exercises over his schoolfellows, “their leader alike in “sport and study” (68), an “ascendant power, which is the destiny of genius” (130). Such is his effect that the consternation is great when rumor circulates he has drowned; with relief, the situation proves only another occasion to bolster his heroic image, for it is instead Coningsby who has performed the rescue of an erstwhile victim. In the narrator’s high-blown praise, “The feat of Coningsby was extolled by all as an act of high gallantry and skill. It confirmed and increased the great reputation which he already enjoyed” (81). The victim turns out to be Oswald Millbank, the son of the industrialist; and the ensuing family obligation to Coningsby will, at the conclusion of the novel, prove to be the means by which Coningsby ascends to a seat in Parliament.

Unfortunately, to meet this demand, Coningsby falls into a trap that Furst identifies particularly with the traditional romantic hero, an “excess of sincerity” (52). Furst describes this romantic temperament as a “A yearning for the inaccessible . . . spring[ing] largely from the idealization of all that is beyond reach. . .” (4), which could also serve as an apt description for the goals of the Young England movement. In his ‘excessive sincerity’ and as a serious embodiment of heroism, Coningsby remains out of bounds of Disraeli’s wit; the “off-hand Byronic cynicism” (9) that Paul Bloomfield sees Disraeli visit on the socially great is unnecessary in the perfections of Coningsby’s character. His sincerity is detrimental to the reader’s interest. As Blake confesses, Coningsby is “curiously uninteresting, essentially passive,

someone to whom things happen” (169), a particularly ironic trait given Disraeli’s oft-proclaimed penchant for action.

The fortuitous turn of events in the drowning incident points up a facet which makes Disraeli’s heroes less remarkable—one which Bagehot found regarding Disraeli’s own tenure of 1876-1880, a dependence on fate. Coningsby is continually acted upon rather than acting. He does not seem to seek power, but waits for circumstance to foist it upon him, which of course is what occurs. Upon his grandfather’s disinheritance, it appears Coningsby will be condemned to life as a lawyer—though he immediately aspires to “The Great Seal” rather than merely torts. Only the intervention of Millbank secures Coningsby’s future. It is puzzling that with all his attributes, the hero’s rise, and therefore the concomitant salvation of England dependent upon that rise, is predicated on chance, and an incredibly long chain of gossip it is: initiated by Lord Eskdale, who tells Sidonia, who explains to Lady Wallingham, who directs her husband to inform Mr. Millbank, who flubs it, requiring Lady Wallingham to pick up the pieces and ensure Oswald Millbank gets the correct details, who relays the information to Mr. Millbank, who must then be relied on to do the graceful thing and retire from the electoral contest, making room for our hero’s destiny. Heroism appears to be servant to Lady Wallingham’s penchant for match-making.

But Coningsby is prepared for this fortuitous turn of events because he also fulfills another traditional requirement of the romantic hero according to Furst, hailing from the leisured class and bothered by no “subsistence-level anxieties” (42). By the Victorian era, however, automatic membership in the aristocracy by virtue of birth was contested, a phenomenon Kroll recognized in the gothic novel that arose in the late eighteenth century. Patriarchy may yet be affirmed in this genre, but the traditional scheme of primogeniture tends to be upset. The gothic puts “its characters into physical and psychological extremes in which the patriarchy appears

purely oppressive or enfeebled . . . [and] the reestablished patriarchy is associated . . . with second sons rather than fathers or their direct heirs” (20). Just as the gothic does, Disraeli questions the legitimacy of the ruling class. In *Coningsby*, Lord Monmouth is the representative of the oppressive sort of the old order who has eschewed the duties of his station; he has also hounded Coningsby’s father to death and caused Coningsby’s separation from and the death of his mother (38). Raised apart from the scene of his grandfather’s consuming self-interest, Coningsby is an outsider and thus gains the necessary degree of separation allowing for an independent education, judgment and, finally, the reestablishment of the patriarchy on honorable terms.

This insistence on merit is a note that Disraeli consistently sounds, if only to justify his own legitimacy in these exalted social circles. But it is, ironically, left to the Whig industrialist, Millbank, to educate Coningsby on Disraeli’s vision of an aristocracy based on merit. The crux of the matter revolves on “how an aristocracy can exist, unless it be distinguished by some quality which no other class of the community possesses” (193). Millbank patently asserts this is not the case. On the contrary, the aristocracy are neither “richer, . . . better informed, wiser, or more distinguished for public or private virtue” (193) than their bourgeois counterparts. Millbank disputes Coningsby’s rejoinder that an ancient lineage provides some guarantee for stability, asserting that not five of the original twenty-nine peers created by Henry VII remained extant and of those not all were legal (194). Their rise, on the contrary, merely devolve from “spoliation of the Church, sale by the Stuarts, and borough mongering” (194). Though Coningsby does not need the benefit of this recommendation with his “connexion” to Lord Monmouth, Disraeli wanted to pave the way for others such as himself and insist on a system which recognized talent and virtue over specious claims of rank. Thus, Disraeli’s treatment of Millbank is sympathetic, contrary to all expectation, as Millbank represents those bourgeois interests Young Englanders

love to decry. *Coningsby* provides a recognition that the future must involve an incorporation of this class, whom John Stuart Mill regarded as the hope of the future (Levine 29), into the ruling councils. The marriage of Edith, Millbank's daughter, to Harry at the conclusion of *Coningsby* symbolizes this union of bourgeois with aristocracy.

Thus, Disraeli illustrates a real dilemma in the struggle for governance of the country: how to promote those with merit while keeping at bay both levelers and what Carlyle terms the "sham-wisest" of the aristocracy, those who will people government if those of Talent are not recognized (95). Carlyle had warned that England must reverence its heroes or suffer its quacks (242). Disraeli introduces the character of Lord Fitz-Booby to illustrate the quacks; that he could represent that caliber of man in Parliament in the Victorian period is revealed in the diary of Lord George Bentinck. He notes that in 1852, only eight years after *Coningsby* was written, Lord Derby and Disraeli attempted to form a Conservative ministry, but were forced to abandon the effort in the face of a dearth of talent—the gathered candidates were either frightened at the prospect, waffling, befuddled—or asleep (Hibbert 71). In fact, Bentinck declares that only half of Parliamentary members ever spoke (Vincent 122), and the attendance rate was equally dismal, especially during hunting season. Walter Bagehot attests to the mediocrity of talent in the Conservative party, vowing, "The grade of gentry who fill the country seats, and mostly compose the Conservative party in the Commons, are perhaps the least able and valuable part of English society" (285).

Disraeli maintains his insistence on a ruling elite, however. Though Millbank challenges its legitimacy, recognition of merit patently does not extend to acceptance of democracy. Though *Coningsby* (as Disraeli) is a sympathizer of both Chartism and Catholicism (Bloomfield 27), his sympathy for Chartist aims excludes any sympathy for the democratization of the country. *Coningsby* firmly abhors that "artificial equality" which democracy represents, and Millbank,

too, the successful bourgeois, vehemently protests against the ‘leveling’ tendency; unfortunately, the House of Commons has come to reflect this leveling, with the men entering it possessed of “neither character, talents nor estate” (195). Disraeli sounds a modern capitalist complaint that leveling, “depress[es] the energies, and check[s] the enterprise of a nation” (194). According to Paul Smith notes that, though Disraeli stole a march on the Liberals by gaining the extended enfranchisement of the working classes in the ’67 Reform Bill, Disraeli only intended to gain voters to the Conservative ranks, not to increase democracy (148). This intent was sorely disabused in ’68, John Stuart Mill recalling that to Disraeli’s appeal to workers, that “he had given them the franchise, they replied, ‘Thank you, Mr. Gladstone’” (Briggs 452).

Not only is Lord Monmouth the exemplification of what aristocracy should not be, in Disraelian lights, but is as well one of the commonly acknowledged fine portraits of character in Disraeli’s novels—Blake terms him the most compelling character in *Coningsby* (215). Arrogant, unscrupulous, lascivious (he dies in the company of courtesans after settling up with his wife and demanding her removal), he possesses a “devising and daring mind, palled with prosperity, and satiated with a life of success” (38). He is solely interested in maintaining his pecuniary interests through control of rotten boroughs, and only returns from residence on the Continent to ensure that he does by installing his henchman, Rigby, in the latest open seat (200). In the climactic argument with Coningsby over entering Parliament we almost sympathize with him, however. Coningsby has maintained he cannot stand with the Conservatives, “who have betrayed their trust; more from ignorance, I admit, than from design; yet clearly a body of individuals totally unequal to the exigencies of the epoch, and indeed unconscious of its real character.” His grandfather commiserates with him, saying “Well, between ourselves, I am quite of the same opinion. . . . But what is the use of lamenting the past? Peel is the only man; suited to the times and all that; at least we must say so, and try to believe so; we can’t go back . . .” (427).

Monmouth is pragmatic about the necessity to work with an obviously pragmatic politician, though his sole object is directed to gaining a dukedom. When he deems the aims of his grandson, purportedly against such “exigencies,” as “fantastical puerilities” (427-8), it is a judgment with which we cannot altogether reject.

But Eton provides Coningsby an environment “in favour of ‘Conservative principles’ . . . where inquiries . . . began gently to circulate, what Conservative principles were” (133). Then Coningsby meets the mysterious Sidonia—appropriately, in good gothic style, on a dark, rainy night at a remote Forest Inn—and learns from him the role of individual character in shaping the “Spirit of the Age” (144). As some books enable the mind to make “a great leap because the author exerts some magnetic influence, . . . ’Tis the same with human beings as with books. All of us encounter, at least once in our life, some individual who utters words that make us think forever.” Sidonia modestly doesn’t say he is that author, but the conclusion is unavoidable, since his words are putatively those that will make Coningsby think forever: “And what is a great man? . . . A great man is one who affects the mind of his generation. . .” (149). Coningsby is obviously being groomed as a candidate for the vacancy.

Echoing Carlyle, Disraeli had earlier intoned, “There is no influence at the same time so powerful and so singular as that of individual character” (103). Weakness of character had allowed the rise of agitation and was responsible for “the Roman Catholic Association, the Political Unions, [and] the Anti-Corn-Law League” (103). Coningsby, armed with his character, is appointed to slay these dragons. The sage, Sidonia, instructs Coningsby in the character he will need to vanquish this enemy.

The digression in *Coningsby* to the characterization of Sidonia allows Disraeli to posit a full-fledged Byronic hero that hovers in an ideal aerie above his more earthbound protagonists

who unavoidably must grub in the everyday. It additionally provides Disraeli an opportunity to argue for the superiority and inclusion of his race in the England of the nineteenth century. This persuasion was necessary because of the ongoing handicap Disraeli's religious heritage posed to his success in Parliament, Richard Levine reminding us that a common view of him was that of Gladstone's, who considered the "Hebrew Mountebank's" intimacy with the Queen an intolerable scandal (27), or Carlyle's, who considered Disraeli "a monkey dancing on John Bull's chest" (Bloomfield 10). Not only does *Sidonia* show Coningsby the shape of heroism, he illustrates at the same time the hypocrisy of those who have accepted counsel and money from Jews while denying them equal place in their societies (270).

Sidonia's father sounds strikingly like a Rothschild, for he is described as "one of the most considerable personages in Europe, . . . [with] monarchs and ministers of all countries court[ing] his advice" (236); after the wars of Europe, when nations needed money, he was there, "ready to lend it to Europe" (236). As a Jew, his son, *Sidonia*, was shut out from university, but, with the aid of an incomparable tutor, scales the heights of intellectual acumen. It takes several pages for Disraeli to exhaust the list of his attainments, which range from reaching "the highest mysteries of mathematics with a facility almost instinctive," to gaining "a complete mastery over the principal European languages" (238). Then, Disraeli puzzlingly paints some ambivalent qualities that sound autobiographical, but are reminiscent of the Plutarchian practice of demurring from self-praise: he "observed everything, thought ever, but avoided serious discussion. If . . . pressed . . . for an opinion . . . took refuge in raillery, or threw out some grave paradox with which it was not easy to cope. . . . He perceived himself a lone being, alike without cares and without duties; sensibility of the heart was lacking in him; He was a man without affections . . . and, to him, Woman was . . . a toy, man a machine; he was concerned only with Intellect and the fortunes of his race; and finally, that no one was less understood" (238-243).

This barrage of description leaves one considering how much of Sidonia reflects Disraeli's own personality. Is Sidonia the incarnation of the hero providing spiritual guidance to Coningsby, functioning, as Levine notes, as Christmas Past functioned for Scrooge (75)? Or is he a glimpse of Disraeli's own personal persona? He seems to be both.

Before turning from Sidonia, it is also interesting to contemplate his prediction for the future structure of government. Despite Disraeli's romantic nature, the outlook transmitted by Sidonia does not reveal any sanguine hopes of a recovery of that by-gone state he draws as an idyll. Though Sidonia pronounces monarchy as a tendency of advancing civilizations (322), the actual prospect of things to come is in question due to the cyclical nature of power. According to this theory, Parliament is doomed to be consumed as the Barons, the Church, and the King have been consumed in their turn (259). All government is transient, and only the shape of the next "consumer" is in question. Sidonia fears it will be class warfare. But, whatever the form this consumer takes, it is only in national character that hope resides to meet the challenge (260), and the national character must be determined not by reason but by passion, for "Man is only truly great when he acts from the passions; never irresistible but when he appeals to the imagination" (262). Thus Sidonia prepares Coningsby for battle, but what is he fighting for?

Disraeli answers this question in the preface of the 1870 edition of his works, when he describes the theme of this first volume of his trilogy as "the derivation and character of political parties" (qtd. in Levine 62), and quite a bit of *Coningsby* is devoted to a didactic account of what is wrong with each. The turmoil over the 1832 Reform Bill opens the action of *Coningsby*, with party operatives Rigby, Tadpole and Taper trading the latest "skinny" on who had last been seen with the King and would therefore be the candidate most likely appointed to form a cabinet. This situation had arisen because Parliament had been dissolved. The House of Lords, with the backing of the King, had attempted to forestall passage of the Reform Bill, but had been

overridden by the House of Commons in, according to Disraeli, a triumph of bourgeois interests over both monarchy and aristocracy, whose power was at a nadir. But this process had begun long beforehand, we are informed, when the Whigs ascended to power after the Glorious Revolution in 1688—even before, if you count the usurpation of the monasteries under Henry VIII. Since that time, the Tories, except for a select few such as Bolingbroke and Carteret, Pitt and Shelburne, had proved indistinguishable from the Whigs (Braun 17-8), both conducting government on the grounds of sheer expediency. Taper’s understanding of a “sound Conservative government” as “Tory men and Whig measures” (129) indicates the cynicism with which Disraeli regarded the pass politics had reached by the 40s. This dismal situation has Harry inquiring vehemently, “What should be conserved?” (125). In 1843, in *Past and Present*, Thomas Carlyle had answered, “Truth and Justice alone are capable of being ‘conserved’” (199), but it is Disraeli’s attempt to answer that question for himself that is at the heart, not only of *Coningsby*, but of the entire Young England trilogy.

At the time of *Coningsby*’s writing, Disraeli had been overlooked by Peel in forming his cabinet and had dissented from his party on sugar duties and a factory bill. Yet Disraeli remained hopeful to salvage something and in his fiction exculpates Peel from the demise of the political parties, ascribing to misfortune Peel’s ascension to power in a party with a “policy which was either founded on no principle whatever, or on principles exactly contrary to those which had always guided the conduct of the great Tory leaders” (95). Further, Disraeli initially withholds recrimination on Peel’s flip-flops of policy, warning that “in passing judgment on public men, it behoves [sic] us ever to take large and extended views of their conduct; and previous incidents will often satisfactorily explain subsequent events, which without their illustrating aid, are involved in misapprehension or mystery” (107).

Whether from sincere disaffection or calculated ambition, Disraeli then proceeds to confirm his renegade status in the Conservative Party by castigating Peel's Tamworth Manifesto. This attempt to dispense with "contentions of party" left (508), we are told, nothing to stand for, nothing to fulfill and no sense of achievement (125). When our exasperated narrator repeats the inquiry, "What should be conserved?" we are answered satirically: "The prerogatives of the Crown, provided they are not exercised; the independence of the House of Lords, provided it is not asserted; the Ecclesiastical estate, provided it is regulated by a commission of laymen" (125). It is not difficult to imagine that such animadversion of his own party would cause Disraeli to be regarded with a certain amount of suspicion; though it was fiction it was also a *roman à clef* of contemporaries.

To ameliorate just such a situation, under Sidonia's tutelage Coningsby gears up to become the spokesman of the new generation. First, he must explain its tenets to his colleague, the mystified Buckhurst—modeled after Alexander Baillie-Cochrane in the Young England coterie (283)—who complains that "if any fellow were to ask me what the Conservative Cause is, I am sure I should not know what to say." Crafting an impromptu manifesto of sorts, Coningsby and Henry Sydney (based on George Smythe) bandy epigrams if not solutions: "the Crown has become a cipher; the Church a sect; the Nobility drones; and the People drudges" (283). With all political parties become a sham, Coningsby and Sydney, along with Vere and Buckhurst, determine to enter the House of Commons and organize an independent party (285), Coningsby defying "moderate feelings and little thoughts in favor of Heroic principle" (287).

The destiny Disraeli conceives for Coningsby then is to procure the salvation of the nation as the leader of a New Generation who will conquer expediency, ciphers, sects, drones and drudges. Young England supplied the principles, satisfying that demand for "the glory of a dogma, the sensation of re-birth, the emotion of a new era" that V.S. Pritchett observes Disraeli

required (Bloomfield 19). Thom Braun, however, conjectures that Disraeli disliked dogma other than the imagined variety (12), and that it perhaps should not be regarded seriously; this is Blake's verdict, at any rate (210). If this is the case, the way McKeon describes the plots of conservative novels can apply as well to Young England's precepts: "... hedged about with self-conscious fictionality, strictly unfulfillable and nowhere to be found" (44). Braun can append that "Young England . . . existed as an imaginative escape, sustained as much by its founders' romantic fancies as it was by any practical notions of political and remedial action" (12); and R.A. Butler agrees, commenting that Young England's vision "never existed outside the imaginations of Disraeli and his colleagues"—which might have been a good thing, for its ideas "came dangerously near denouncing all that had been achieved by constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy" (500). Indeed, when Disraeli was bruited, unavoidably, as a candidate for the new ministry of Lord Derby, Prince Albert had to be reassured, for he "had democratic tendencies that could make him one of the most dangerous men in Europe" (Vincent 90).

The precepts of the Young England group appear to consist in insubstantial visions and yearnings for the past (Blake 168), and these precepts are translated by Coningsby into the credo of the New Generation, principally exemplified by a nostalgic kvetching that boils down to what McKeon identifies as the typical reactive conservative plot: "a retrograde series of disenchantments with all putative resolutions" (44). Blake adds that Young England was "the reaction of a defeated class to a sense of its own defeat" (171). Disraeli's fictional hero, then, can only expostulate for moral rejuvenation rather than call for any concrete action. Disraeli's paternalism, his "royalist views" (Butler 8), and his desire for ceremony sounded a nostalgic note for medievalism, and the prescriptions of both the Young England movement for which Disraeli

became spokesman and the New Generation of his fiction reflect this yearning for an irretrievable way of life.

In Disraeli's view, the cause of this loss resides in the development of Utilitarianism. When Lord Henry Sydney rues that "Everything has gone by that is beautiful," he speaks for Disraeli's penchant for a return to an idyllic Camelot and his vision of the importance of ceremony (167). His sentiment is countered by the Whig Utilitarian, Lord Evringham, who argues for the benefits of industrial advances which have made life much easier. To Lord Henry's response, that formerly the struggle for existence was not so dire as to eliminate manners and ceremony as industrialization has done (167), Evringham responds that "Civilization has no time for ceremony" (167). In Lord Henry's father, Disraeli portrays one of the remnants of the admirable brand of aristocrat that yet discharges the obligations that accompany landed wealth. The new scientific reliance on statistics has confounded this archetype's natural instincts, however. His humanistic impulses have been stymied in the face of his Whig son-in-law's use of numbers. Though Lord Henry would defend the traditional rights of the peasantry as defying economics, Lord Evringham asserts that the "Spirit of the Age" is symbolized by the New Poor Law and Utility (160), attempts to scientifically and rationally approach human problems. The utilitarian bureaucracy established by the likes of Lord Evringham and his fellow Benthamites in the New Poor Law undercuts tradition and serves to distance the aristocracy from their responsibilities—not coincidentally making it cheaper to do so. It is this removal of the hands-on approach of out-door relief that served to make the individual peasant an anonymous figure, a member of a different class, establishing those conditions which Sidonia warns will lead to that horror which Victorians could envision, class arrayed against class.

Only passion and imagination can subdue that great evil of Benthamism (262), and Disraeli contrasts Lord Evringham's view of the poor with the emotional involvement of the Catholic, Eustace Lyle. In contrast to the centralized workhouses that have replaced outdoor relief, the beneficent Mr. Lyle continues to distribute alms in the old-fashioned manner (160). By this ceremony, "the people constantly and visibly . . . comprehend that Property is their protector and their friend" (170). Lyle and Coningsby commiserate that the Crown and Church had served in the past as the most effective advocates for the People against their persecutors, with Coningsby suggesting—from sentiment Disraeli inherited from his father, a great apologist for Charles I—that the king might have escaped execution had he executed all the Catholic priests requested by Parliament (171). The role of the Church that Eustace Lyle envisions is that of a "mythical benevolent feudal system" (Blake 172), which principally reflects the influence of Faber and Newman, according to Blake; consequently, "the Oxford movement was translated by Cambridge from religion into politics" (171).

Lyle's—and Disraeli's—idealization of paternalism is reflected in the rounds which Lady Evringham conducts with Coningsby in attendance (172-3). In his portrayal of Lady Evringham in *Coningsby*, Disraeli exhibits his admiration for women. The wit and description he uses to describe her confirms Smith's comment—provocative as it may be—that "Unusually for a man Disraeli liked women" (33). In her biography of Disraeli, Jane Ridley reminds us that Disraeli felt that it was the sympathy of Woman that made for great men (344). The sentiment is reflected when Coningsby admits "There is something fascinating in the first idea that your career interests a charming woman . . . A woman who likes ambitious men must be no ordinary character; clearly a sort of heroine" (169). It's not a stretch to imagine Disraeli harboring these same feelings in the many relationships he maintained with women throughout his life, ranging

from his sister, Sarah; to the first patron of his work, Sarah Austen; to his wife, Mary Anne; to Queen Victoria.

The ease with which women can interrupt the course of the hero in these novels is striking, however. Without the arrival of a more salon-fähig dandy to usurp the ladies' attention and to dislodge Coningsby from a bucolic sojourn at Lord Henry's estate (176), his quest to salvage England with Young England's principles could well have been detoured. Over the course of the trilogy, female characters gradually increase in stature, and with their rise Frietzsche remarks a corresponding diminution in the strength of will and aggressive qualities of the male hero. By the last novels, *Lothair* and *Endymion*, "a marked feminine dominance" occurs (7). In *Coningsby*, however, the main female character, Edith Millbank, remains a cipher.

Disraeli's attempts to convince us of the efficacy of private charity as a solution to poverty rely on the idyllic pictures he draws of these personal rounds and on the Christmas celebration at Beaumanoir. Its traditional observances supposedly reveal that gratitude which

a mere mechanical mitigation of the material necessities of the humbler classes . . . can never alone avail sufficiently to ameliorate their condition; that their condition is not merely a 'knife and fork question,' . . . that a simple satisfaction of the grosser necessities of our nature will not make a happy people; . . . [Y]ou must cultivate the heart as well as seek to content the belly; and . . . the surest means to elevate the character of the people is to appeal to their affections. (460)

Not that men do not rise above their stomachs when occasion demands, but this appeal for character and for fore-lock tugging gratitude toward local big-wigs has led at least one critic to speculate that Disraeli is being ironic here—as when he suggests the revival of maypole dancing to ameliorate the people's situation—and that Disraeli is manifestly aware of the inadequate

nature of such favorite Young England daydreams. While it would be nice to speculate that this is the case, Disraeli's romanticism is too ingrained to question the sincerity of this vision.

Disraeli was capable of poking fun at the very doctrine under whose banner he had enlisted. As a topic of conversation at one of the society balls his characters attend, Disraeli has a Mr. Melton contemplating the up-and-coming generation promenading by, which includes Buckhurst, Henry Sydney, Coningsby and Lady Evringham. Attempting to decipher the ideas they were espousing, he imparts to his neighbor:

'I don't know what it is exactly; but I think we shall hear more of it.'

'A sort of animal magnetism, or unknown tongues, I take it from your description,' said his companion.

'Well, I don't know what it is,' said Mr. Melton; 'I had some idea of giving my mind to it, they made such a fuss about it at Evringham; but it requires a devilish deal of history, I believe, and all that sort of thing.' (410-1)

Also, when Coningsby confidently imparts to Sir Joseph his theory of England as a Venetian Republic governed by a Dogeship and that the commonly accepted history of the country is a subversion of the true one by a Venetian oligarchy, Sir Joseph, admirably restrained in the face of such whipper-snapperish presumption, intimates a similar mystification as Mr. Melton, saying, "I will venture to say that there are very few men on our side in the House of Commons who are aware that they were born under a Venetian Constitution" (387). "Let us go to the ladies," interrupts Millbank, to distract attention; for the New Generation had no concrete actions to propose. Their dismissal of current practice in preference for dying traditions left little action even possible. Which only left the aim of ambition, and Coningsby confides to Millbank, "For myself, I prefer fame to life; and yet, the consciousness of heroic deeds to the most wide-

spread celebrity” (379). This would tend to contradict D.R. Schwarz’s observation that ambition always precedes a cause with Disraeli’s heroes (104), but if the second alternative is mooted by impracticable doctrine, it comes to the same thing in the end. As Walter Houghton comments, “where there is no definite goal, [aspiration] becomes an end in itself (291).

The penultimate chapter of *Coningsby* begins by detailing the change which had occurred by the spring of 1841, when the populace recognized that a party of great principles had arisen with a definite, energetic policy, foreshadowing a Conservative victory. Disraeli marks the transition of power to his party with ambivalence, however, commenting satirically that the populace were certainly given no grounds for such a belief (482). *Coningsby* concludes not only with Coningsby’s marriage to Edith, but with his election to Parliament from the benevolence of a Whig. Coningsby is the hero-elect at the threshold of his career, optimistically ready to solve the problems of the nation as the representative of a New Generation (194).

While, with this ending, the romantic hero is successful on the surface, other things have taken place in the novel: Coningsby has critiqued the ruling class while reestablishing his claim to it on the basis of merit, and he has met rising capitalism and has either accommodated it or been subsumed in it—given Millbank’s help and Coningsby’s only incipient career, we cannot be sure which.

Sybil

In *Sybil*, the certainties of the romantic hero become disabused as he faces the threat of desperate workers and conspiring radicals. His qualities, too, while retaining those of the romantic hero, suggest a more world-wise figure maturing from the innocence of Coningsby. Unlike Harry Coningsby, Charles Egremont exhibits a certain petulance and dilatoriness at the outset of *Sybil*, refusing to initiate a rapprochement with his older brother and persuading his mother to compose a necessary letter in his behalf (25). When we first meet him, he belongs to

that bored, frivolous group of idle young aristocrats whom Disraeli describes as having exhausted all life's pleasures in their teens. Their most serious occupation over a twelve-month period has been calculating their wagers on the upcoming Derby. Disraeli's sense of irony in this vignette is remarked by Paul Smith, who writes, "Both in *Coningsby* and *Sybil*, his attitude to the traditional ruling class was deeply ambiguous. It was as though the need to suck up entailed a compensatory urge to spit out" (66). This opening scene merely sets the stage for a continuation of that social critique witnessed in *Coningsby*, though its ostensible *raison d'être*, according to Disraeli in the 1870 preface, was to examine the social condition of the people. In doing so, Paul Bloomfield sees in *Sybil* the first novel that dealt with the condition of the poor (26) and Louis Cazamian adds that in its featuring of class conflict, it is a "perfect illustration of the changing current of English history between 1840 and 1850" (191). In addition, the unattributed introduction to the Wordsworth edition of *Sybil* says that "despite its paternalism and sometimes operatic romanticism, *Sybil* is a keenly observed piece of social satire . . ." (ii).

Carlyle had written, "In Poor and Rich, instead of noble thrift and plenty, there is idle luxury alternating with mean scarcity" (74), and this alternation between the Two Nations is just what Disraeli shows us, depicting in the scene of the betting saloon—one which has the same tenor as *The Importance of Being Earnest*—Mr. Mountchesney and Lord de Vere languidly ordering "tumblers of Badminton" and "consuming delicacies for which they had no appetite" (4). This scene is in great counterpoint to the later one of the Widow Carey attempting to vend a paltry basket of cherries to destitute mill workers, who have appetites but nothing to consume. As Mrs. Carey says, "whether bread be cheap or dear don't much signify, if we have nothing to buy it with" (302). Such a critique of the wide disparity between Rich and Poor prompts Butler to observe that Disraeli's writing had more in common with Carlyle's prose than with other novels (10), but Disraeli's writing was adjudged by Paul Bloomfield as more readable and as

reaching a wider audience than Carlyle's did, citing Monckton Milnes comment that *Past and Present* "might have caused popular disturbances . . . if Carlyle had written in plain English and it had been widely read" (Bloomfield 26). The way in which Disraeli's phrase has insinuated itself into common use is illustrated by the appearance of the phrase "two nations" in such a far-flung instance as Wilfred Stone's 1966 study of E.M. Forster.

Disraeli's social critique continues with a further example of the dichotomy between Rich and Poor when he describes the seemingly bucolic setting of the Egremonts' country seat, the village of Marney, "In a spreading dale, contiguous to the margin of a clear and lovely stream, surrounded by meadows and gardens, and backed by lofty hills" (46). He immediately demolishes its picturesque High Street façade, however, revealing amid open ditches of filth the crowded hovels of unchinked stone and sodden thatch in which multiple generations tried to survive, infested by disease and want. Disraeli will go on to describe vividly the household of the skilled weaver, Mr. Warner, whose children's clothes have been sold to obtain breakfast, due to the inadequacy of his infinitesimal earnings, a penny an hour (99). Mr. Warner clearly observes the cause of his plight:

It is that the capitalist has found a slave that has supplanted the labour and ingenuity of man. Once he was an artisan: at the best, he now only watches machines; and even that occupation slips from his grasp, to the woman and the child. The capitalist flourishes, he amasses immense wealth; we sink, lower and lower; lower than the beasts of burthen; for they are fed better than we are, cared for more. And it is just, for according to the present system they are more precious. And yet they tell us that the interests of Capital and of Labour are identical. (100)

Disraeli further traces the cause of such poverty to the dislocation of the agricultural workers through various Enclosure Acts, by which landholders relieved themselves of their maintenance by bumping them from the land. These woes were then exacerbated by an ebb tide in the supply-and-demand cycle of the manufacturing economy which left unemployment in its wake. Rick-burning and the rise of the Chartist movement accompanied the desperation of the people and also sees the arrival of Charles Egremont on Marney's High Street. His development is about to begin as he becomes familiar with the condition of the people, a necessary introduction, because, as we are told after he has been returned to Parliament from his family's seat, he knows nothing about it (42). When he meets a leader of the workers, Walter Gerard, and his companion, the Radical printer, Stephen Morley, in the ruins of the old abbey, it is the latter who awakens him to the existence of Two Nations, "The Rich and the Poor" (58).

Following on the theme of legitimacy begun by Mr. Millbank in *Coningsby*, Disraeli pursues the spurious provenance of the Marneys and the de Mowbrays in *Sybil*, introducing the character of Baptist Hatton, appropriately dubbed, as the procurer of old names for the rebirth of ambitious men into lords, earls, and dukes. The lineage through which the Marney's claim their rank stems from one Baldwill Greymount, who had managed to obtain "sundry grants of abbey lands" while serving as one of Henry VIII's commissioners who received "the surrender of divers religious houses" (10). Under Elizabeth's reign the plunder had continued, and through an opportune conversion to the religious position of William III, an earldom was eventually gained (11). Reminiscent of Dickens' Barnacles in *Little Dorritt*, who had insinuated themselves into all the nooks of governmental sinecure, the Egremonts had garnered "no contemptible portion of public money and public dignities," (11) without ever having served in any distinguished capacity.

Likewise, Lord de Mowbray has attained his station through manipulation, having been awarded a baronetcy for services rendered and by a stubborn clinging to principle until a satisfactory reward had been offered for his vote. Disraeli chronicles his transformation from waiter in a club in St. James' Street into, first, Lord Fitz-Warene, and finally, through adroit political tactics under William IV and the assistance of Baptist Hatten, into the Earl of Mowbray.

Thus, the exposition of the relativity of claims to status begun in *Coningsby* is pursued in this novel; and the argument for an aristocracy of merit poses the well-deserving Walter Gerard against the claims of frauds to nobility. Further, it is both Gerard and Morley who opposed the romantic hero and who challenge the existing order as representatives of the workers and the radicals, respectively. Egremont must successfully defuse their concerns to avert turmoil. The fact that Gerard is legitimately an aristocrat—even down to his Saxon bloodhound, Harold—but has been cheated out of his rightful inheritance, mitigates Disraeli's message of the worker meriting a share in political power, but as in *Coningsby*, it is not Disraeli's purpose to discredit the institution of aristocracy, but only to reestablish it on firmer ground. Evidently, Disraeli used this means to make the transition more palatable.

Disraeli grants a legitimacy and a sympathy to Gerard's complaints which he withholds from Stephen Morley's position, however. We can infer the disdain with which Disraeli regards him when Morley maintains that the railroads have done as much for mankind as the monasteries. Similarly, his advocacy of communities formed on an Owenite basis falls foul of Disraeli's position, one unquestioningly supportive of the inviolability of property. When he is revealed to be an atheist, attempts to blackmail Sybil to save her father from arrest (262), and plots with Hatton to incite insurrection for a ten thousand pound payment (293), he forfeits all moral credibility, and thereby his political position is thoroughly undercut. It comes as no surprise that Morley will be defeated by Egremont in the battle for Sybil's hand—even the dog is

against him—though it does come as an unexpected shock when he attacks Egremont in the fog, made more so by Disraeli's prose here, so amorphous it requires two readings to be sure it has occurred. Because Morley's scientific philosophy is rejected in these other areas, Thom Braun speculates that Disraeli intends to call into question his formulation of the "two nations" theory. Robert O'Kell agrees with this assessment, calling the text an attack on Morley's "materialist conception of human nature"; since it is Morley who has introduced the idea of the "two nations," Disraeli implicitly discredits that chasm when he discredits Morley (O'Kell 226). The concluding union of aristocracy with worker, symbolized by Egremont's and Sybil's marriage, echoes *Coningsby's* union that crosses class lines. This union indicates that Disraeli's solution for the breach is a romantic one and one which avoids the radical upheaval which Morley's course threatens.

Disraeli also paved the way for an eventual admission of the worker to political power by demonstrating that their views were neither monolithic nor necessarily antipathetic to those of the upper class. When Caroline, Harriet, Julia, and Mrs. Carey congregate in The Temple of the Muses, Caroline sounds an anti-bourgeois note, blaming the middle class for low wages (326). Julia adds her disapproval of the election of the middle class Muddlefish, saying, "If we can't have our own man, I am all for the Nobs against the Middle Class" (314). Mrs. Carey illustrates the limited aims and grievances with which most of the working class are concerned, when she allows the Queen and the peerage enjoyment of their things in return merely for "good wages and plenty to do"; and she offers up her commiseration with Queen Victoria, "a poor innocent young creature" beset by her ministers. Harriet voices the most activist stance when she vows to refuse marriage to anyone that does not support the suffrage or "the five points." The promise of these characters is illustrated in the denouement when Dandy Mick and Devilsdust become capitalists and with Egremont's backing are tabbed as future members of Parliament (358).

Initially, Egremont does not appear a suitable candidate to groom as a hero. At Eton, we are told, Egremont was not surrounded by those of high character such as those who had comprised Coningsby's associates (26-7). Rather, in his case, "To do nothing and get something formed a boy's ideal of a manly career" (27). Egremont leaves Oxford in 1833 with only "puerile" accomplishments, "extravagant tastes and expensive habits" (29) to his credit. But after he returns from the Continent recovered from a failed love affair, he is chastened, and infected with distaste for the "arrogant and frigid life, alike devoid of sympathy and real grandeur" (31). Then he glimpses Sybil, Gerard's daughter, silhouetted and singing amid the abbey ruins. Immediately adopting a pseudonym to avoid the prejudice against the rich, he takes up residence in her neighborhood. The new perspective he gains here of the plight of the people engenders a commitment to their cause which inspires his moves in Parliament. He becomes a diligent and sympathetic spokesman for the people's interest and gains Sybil's love as the author of a singular speech before Parliament in their behalf. Disraeli himself would be one of only five members of Parliament in 1840 to speak in sympathy for the Chartists and against the severe punishment meted out to their leaders, and he would also oppose his party over money to outfit a Birmingham police force which was to be used against the Chartists (162).

Egremont comes to occupy some middle ground in Furst's range of qualities of the romantic hero, one end of which is inhabited by the hero whose dominance stems from interest in his own psyche, and the other which is marked by a hero with a cause outside himself (43). Egremont eventually forms such a commitment, contradicting Schwarz's claims that ambition consistently predominates as the motivating force of Disraeli's heroes (88). Egremont thus embodies both the ethos of duty that Furst associates with the archetypal hero, and the ethos of feeling which attaches to the romantic hero (43). Cazamian detects a maturation of character

from Coningsby to Egremont, with Egremont actually developing opinions and acting on them (193), and Robert O’Kell concurs, seeing Egremont transformed in the novel from

languorous aristocrat who stood for Parliament ‘at the instigation of the family’ and from ‘no feeling of his own,’ to an energetic representative of the people’s interests, who in his new vigor can only mock those of his own class who think of politics as a game of social intrigue . . . (224)

Egremont, in his second-son status and in his estrangement from his brother—there existed “a sort of bad-tempered good understanding” between them (298)—gains that necessary distance to critique his own class and to eventually reestablish the patriarchy on the more secure footing of admirable character.

Lord Marney “hated Egremont with double distilled virulence” and we eventually piece together that his wife, Arabella, was Egremont’s first love, whose family, not necessarily she, had jilted him in favor of the eldest son (62). The portrayal of Arabella in *Sybil* is again a sympathetic and admiring one like those of the women in *Coningsby*. She escapes stultifying romantic depiction, exhibiting instead the freshness that speaks of first-hand familiarity and observation. As Speare comments, Disraeli was “one of the first of the nineteenth century to defend the right of women to rank as intellectual beings” (179), and Arabella is characterized as possessing “no inconsiderable talents, with an intelligence richly cultivated” (41), and later, as being “a woman of abilities. . . . [and] excellent sense, . . . far from devoid of sensibility” (62). Disraeli demonstrates an unusual sensitivity in the Victorian era to the limited situation of women when he pictures Arabella as subject to the capricious orders of Lord Marney, “a husband . . . scarcely her equal in intellect, and far her inferior in all the genial qualities. . . .” (62). The Lady Joan de Mowbray, touted as a match for Egremont, is also shown to possess striking intellectual abilities, exhibiting her opinions on Aztec cities along with several historical theories

relating to their discovery; from that topic ranging to Egypt and the Pharaohs; the phonetic system; Paris and Champollion; and her scientific correspondence (111), a listing which gently hints at a certain tiresomeness in her erudition.

Despite sharing the accoutrements of the romantic hero, as in *Coningsby*, the hero in *Sybil* passively accepts the destiny for which others pave the way. Disraeli puts the motivating will to power with Lady Marney, Egremont's mother; she is the one who determines he is to run for Parliament when the Duke of Wellington's ministry falls in 1837. Similarly, Sybil, in contrast to the depictions of Lady Marney, Arabella and Lady St. Julians, is deprived of vivacity, again in Disraeli's romantic attempt to style an ideal. Only once in the book, when venturing into the disreputable sections of London in search of her father, does she emerge as a felt character. Otherwise, she is alternately described in off-putting terms as "The Religious," or in reverent tones as "the daughter of Gerard," "daughter of the people's blood," or as "a ministering angel"—all in the span of two pages (106-7). Her father makes allowances for her, citing her desire to enter the cloister; and admits it may be for the best, "For the married life of a woman of our class in the present condition of our country is a lease of woe" (117). In *Tancred*, when she makes a cameo appearance at a dinner given by Sidonia, she remains true to cardboard form, a remote ideal figure (137-8).

Lord Marney and the Earl de Mowbray are the *Sybil* correlates of Lord Monmouth and Lord Evringham in *Coningsby*, again modeling those of the upper class who have abdicated their responsibilities. Marney's emphasis on material success is a reminder of Carlyle's comment that hell for the British is "not making money" (184), and Lord Marney does not pass up any opportunity to do so, refusing to discharge Charles' election expenses, advocating Utilitarianism and the new Poor Law to reduce his obligations (94), and opposing a railway right-of-way as an enterprise for the canaille (108) until his price has been met. He is jealous of the triple rents that

accrue to Lord Mowbray from the mills situated in his district, while Mowbray, in encouraging the rise of these manufacturing interests, contributes to the destruction of that idyllic existence which, in what Raymond Williams calls rural retrospect (83), Disraeli envisioned. In the view of Mr. St. Lys, the Anglican vicar of Mowbray, domestic life had become an impossible condition for the people to realize under the urbanizing juggernaut of industry, but this is a contention with which Lord Marney takes issue, determining instead, in a nod to Malthus, Ricardo, and the entire nineteenth-century slate of political economists, that the difficult conditions are “an affair of population” (95). To Mr. St. Lys’ wonderment that the people can contrive to live on eight shillings a week, Marney responds that he has “generally found the higher the wages the worse the workman,” and advocates emigration as the cure. In St. Lys’ declaration to Lord Marney that “You have declared war to the cottage, then. It is not at the first sound so startling a cry as war to the castle,” Disraeli paraphrases an 1844 comment found in *The Times* that Friedrich Engels cites in his *Condition of the Working Class in England*, “War to palaces, peace unto cabins—that is a battle-cry of terror which may come to resound throughout our country. Let the wealthy beware!” (298).

The Catholic, Sybil, in her charitable works, and Mr. St. Lys, in his espousal of tradition, are *Sybil*’s counterparts to Eustace Lyle in *Coningsby*, but D.R. Schwarz sees Disraeli’s implication of Catholic and Anglican as “not fundamentally different” as a controversial one to make in 1845 (112), one which seemingly endorses the aims of the Oxford Movement. Also, it is St. Lys who first tenders Disraeli’s contentious view of Christianity as completed Judaism (97), a theme that will be treated in even more depth in *Tancred*. St. Lys blames the Church for deserting the people, no longer satisfying the wants of human nature or “by its festivals reliev[ing] the painful weariness of toil” (96). In foregoing its traditional forms and ceremonies, St. Lys sees a suppression of “the divinest instincts of our nature” (96). However, Disraeli

distances himself from Newman and Puseyism when his St. Lys is careful to marginalize the importance of Rome to the institution of the Church, asking “What has Rome to do” with either the completion or commencement of Christianity?

Walter Gerard will also express a nostalgia for the “influence of the old church system on the happiness and comfort of the People” (140) and traces the seizing of the monasteries under Henry VIII as initiating the decline of its influence. When, in voicing an idealization of the Church and a dislike of the developing economic system, Gerard states that “. . . if we could only have the Church on our side . . . we would soon put an end to the demon tyranny of Capital” (388), he could well be a Young Englander.

As his cure for this spiritual malaise as well as a cure for their political weakness, Egremont offers up Young England’s paternalism. He enlightens Sybil in her stubborn illusion of the power of the people, that

The People are not strong. . . . Their attempts at self-vindication will end only in their suffering . . . It is civilization that . . . is effecting this change. It is that increased knowledge of themselves that teaches the educated their social duties . . . The new generation of the Aristocracy of England are not tyrants Their intelligence, better than that, their hearts, are open to the responsibility of their position They are the natural leaders of the People (334)

Egremont entreats Sybil to realize that “The people . . . were not that pure embodiment of unity of feeling, of interest, and of purpose which she had pictured that human affairs, even in an age of revolution, are the subject of compromise . . .” (349). To Sybil’s contention that the rich and the poor are divided, and that “the lion and the lamb will not lie down together” (354), Egremont presents a more encouraging picture, labeling Sybil’s pessimism vain and distressing, the “opinions of the generation that is vanishing.” Though he sympathizes with the people, he

insists it will not be democracy, the “leveling principle,” which will ameliorate their condition but a philosophy of a rising tide floating all boats: “. . . not a principle adverse to privileges, but favourable to their extension. It will seek to ensure equality, not by leveling the Few but by elevating the many” (353). Egremont declares “that the social happiness of the millions should be the first object . . . or the pomp and power of courts and empires, [would be] alike worthless” (350).

Disraeli’s critique of politics and Peel continues in this second volume of the trilogy. In *Sybil*, Peel is represented as the “gentleman in Downing Street,” who instructs his lieutenant, Mr. Hoaxem, how to field two opposing deputations “frankly and explicitly . . . the right line to take when you wish to conceal your own mind and to confuse the minds of others” (297). Disraeli describes the “gentleman” as procrastinating about the necessity of “respectful candour” and of allowing conviction to slowly steal over one’s countenance (295); therefore he delegates to Mr. Hoaxem the task, enjoining him to give one group the assurance that “my only object has been to render protection more protective.” To Hoaxem’s objection, “Would not that assurance, I humbly suggest, clash a little with my previous demonstration . . . ?” (296) the gentleman receives an admiring glance from his subordinate in his manipulation of statistics to convince the other group that he was actually making provisions cheaper (297). This exchange would become even more apropos by 1846 as Peel ultimately veered away from a majority of his own party and sided with Repeal of the Corn Laws.

The Corn Laws were an issue that far more than their affect on prices—scholars argue back and forth over their true effects—pointed to that existence of that chasm between rich and poor that Disraeli hoped to deny, and has his hero attempt to mitigate by a symbolic alliance with Sybil. The gulf remained, however, despite Egremont’s good intentions. Although the union of aristocracy with working class imagined in *Sybil* does not succeed, it is in such a union that

Maurois sees a foreshadowing of one of Disraeli's later master strokes in politics (241), the 1867 Reform Bill (though Lord Stanley would dispute whether Disraeli had any other view than "dishing" the Liberals in this maneuver). Edgar Feuchtwanger writes that the sociological insights reached in *Sybil* were "remarkably similar to those that Marx and Engels were reaching at almost the same time. . ." (55). While Engels dismissed Young England's object as unattainable and ridiculous, he does applaud in its intentions "the courage to resist the existing state of things and prevalent prejudices, and to recognize the vileness of our present condition" (298). Egremont's New Generation can be similarly painted. Egremont, while accepting the responsibilities of his position courageously, is far from accomplishing any lasting solution with his unattainable romanticism. It is three good harvests (358), not any efficacy of the hero, which ease tensions at the end of *Sybil*, signifying a fortuitous but merely temporary cure to this vileness.

In the novel, however, there exists the unsettling of the status quo through Egremont's ascendancy after his brother's death; there is the critique of the methods of government in the hands of expedient politicians; and there is the necessary accommodation of the interests of the workers which serves to diminish any role for a romantic hero. Instead, we have a grounded, conscientious parliamentarian working diligently within the system.

Tancred

While Coningsby was an outsider by birth from the aristocratic inner circle of his grandfather, and Egremont was an outsider both by virtue of being the second son and by choice in his incognito, Tancred is an "outsider of genius" (Smith 86), psychologically alienated from the material culture of the mid-nineteenth century. As in *Coningsby* and *Sybil*, *Tancred or the New Crusade* also concerns the development of a hero, who, while embodying heroic qualities also gains, as Paul Smith puts it, the necessary "obliquity of view" to provide criticism of the

status quo (86). Edmund Speare cites Tancred's critique in the first third of *Tancred* as being among the most bitter of Disraeli's satires on the society of the upper class; and Blake lauds, accurately, this portion of the novel, saying that there is rarely a dull page (220).

While the first volume, *Coningsby*, dealt with the character of political parties, and the second, *Sybil*, with the condition of the People, *Tancred* explores, according to Disraeli in his 1870 preface, "the duties of the Church as a main remedial agency in our present state" (Braun, *Disraeli the Novelist*, 112-13). After the initial third of the book, however, the scene shifts from England and its picture of high society and the (lack of) the Church "in our present state," to Syria and the hero's quest for spiritual fulfillment. As Speare reminds us, Disraeli wanted to consummate an alliance between the Crown, the Church, and the People; and to do so, "a spiritual renaissance was necessary for England; a new crusade had to be undertaken, the Asian mystery had to be again discovered before English character, chastened and made intelligent by a visit to the Holy Land, might rear a great empire" (81). Edward Dramin sees it as an effort to "counteract the division between the two nations," by forwarding the visions of Ruskin, Carlyle, and Morris of inspiring national unity with "the efficacy of traditional Christianity" (24). The optimism for change that had been exhibited by the naïve Harry Coningsby and the more world-wise pragmatism of Egremont has evolved, however, in *Tancred* to pessimism regarding changing the moral condition of England.

Not only in outlook but in character, we detect in *Tancred* a difference with the Etonian heroes, Coningsby and Egremont. Rather than inhabiting the center of an admiring group of schoolfellows or wide circle of acquaintance, Tancred is described as

inscrutable. He has formed himself in solitude, and has ever repelled any advance to intimacy, either from those who were his inferiors or his equals in station. He has never had a companion. . . . As a child he was shy and silent, and as a man . . .

. he never disburthened. His passion for study has been ardent; his power of application is very great; his attention unwearied as long as there is anything to acquire; but he never seeks . . . opinions, and never offers his own. (66-7)

Though Tancred does not exhibit any of that “moral equivocalness” that Furst ascribes to a Romantic hero caught in the ambivalence of an age of transition (43), there is a lack of direction and resolution to his spiritual quest. As Schwarz writes, he pursues the “lure of false ultimates” (101) and comes up empty-handed. Many critics remark the unsatisfactory denouement of *Tancred*, with the unexpected, unwarranted and inconclusive arrival of the Duke and Duchess of Bellamont, Tancred’s parents, in Jerusalem; especially as Tancred has just finished denying any complicating familial connections to Eva on the previous page. This ending only supports Blake’s contention that “long before the end it is clear that Disraeli has no idea what to do with his hero” (215), and it is true that Tancred meanders from one Fakredeem-inspired engagement from another to little purpose, even the appearance of an angel failing to provide direct guidance. Schwarz’s opinion, that Tancred never discovers any direction, resulting in the novel “dissolving into a spiritual myth of Sisyphus” (101) has much to be said for it, for in the end, England’s moral situation has not been uplifted in any fashion. Thus, the ultimate disillusionment of Disraeli’s protagonists is at hand.

Tancred’s withdrawal to Jerusalem reveals not only Disraeli’s fascination with the Middle East—Aronson observing that his journey there affected his thinking for the rest of his days (21)—but also an awareness of the difficulties of effecting change in English society. The Young England movement had foundered by the time of *Tancred*’s publication in 1847—Mark Girouard attributes the break up to the 1846 Repeal of the Corn Laws, when George Smythe and Alexander Baillie-Cochrane went with Peel, while John Manners remained loyal to Disraeli (85); Paul Smith sites it in the disagreement over the funding of the Catholic seminary, Maynooth, in

1845 (83)—and Disraeli realized the impossibility of reconstituting society on a patriarchal, medieval basis. Though Tancred is enjoined by an angel to proclaim an imminent “theocratic equality,” Tancred does not exactly fulfill this mandate, his brief foray into world conquest aborted in favor of a prospective wedding match. Admittedly tying West with East and Christian with Jew, this match falls short of providing any spiritual renaissance for England. Schwarz doubts even this conclusion (102-3), pointing out that Eva never verbally assents to Tancred’s proposal, but merely sinks her head upon his shoulder. Had she agreed, the valedictory tone is one of disillusion when she laments, “there have been heroic aspirations wasted, and noble energies thrown away” (484). Tancred suffers what Furst sees as the disillusion which foreshadows the anti-hero’s “aware[ness] of the intrinsic futility of willing and seeking” (45). Tancred can identify no end, and is left stranded with the “Great Asian Mystery.” In writing *Tancred*, Disraeli reflects what Furst identifies as a romantic strategy of the hero, “withdrawal to a realm of his own, where he may cultivate the Utopia of his pipe-dreams” (Furst 50).

The book begins with the predictably romantic qualities of Tancred, Lord Montacute, complete with a “sweet yet stately character” which has earned the devotion of the county (15)—even the footman’s family counts themselves fortunate for the paternalism of his family, the Bellamonts, whose provincial seat is “the prettiest town in the world” (23). Political intrigue is soon introduced to mar the repose of this idyll. His presence is requested because the county has fallen victim to a loss of representation through the new Schedule A, posed as a ploy of the Whigs to decrease that rural representation which was principally the stronghold of the Tories (23).

Possessing the same heroic character as Coningsby and Egremont, Tancred, like them, waits for opportunity to come to him—it is at the instigation of his parents that Tancred is to take his place in their hereditary seat of Parliament. His aptitude is generally acknowledged and “If

anything can save the aristocracy in this leveling age, it is an appreciation of men of genius” (39). He rejects this fate, however, telling Lord Henry at a dinner given by Sidonia, that “Parliament seems to me to be the very place which a man of action should avoid” (136)—an avoidance which Smith finds indicative of Disraeli’s “disillusionment with Young England as a political movement” (103). Beset by the questions, “What is Duty? and what is Faith? What ought I to do, and what ought I to believe?” (55), Tancred sees Parliament as insignificant in the affairs of the nation, special interests and public opinion having come to wield decisive power in the country (136-7). While his parents assume that the usual Continental Tour is Tancred’s aim, he disabuses them—Paris would destroy the body, Rome the soul (57). Instead, with support from Sidonia, who reappears in this novel to act as mentor, Tancred remains firm in his resolve to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

This destination is loudly denigrated at a party at Deloraine House, the London abode of the Duke and Duchess, for Jerusalem has no sport of any kind (85). In spite of this judgment, Tancred garners the approving attention of the women, who are attracted to “a face of intelligence” (86), first that of Lady Constance Rawleigh, who “admired intellect, . . . a booby would not content her” (87). We are then diverted with Disraeli’s description of the rigors of social ascendancy as Disraeli takes stock of the progress of the ladder-climbing career of Mrs. Guy Flouncey whose story was begun in *Coningsby* (222). There she had been slighted by the reigning mavens; by the time of *Tancred*, she has invaded and conquered society “like the English in India,” though such conquests can only be maintained “at immense cost, like the French in Algiers” (90). In the vignette of Lady Valentine sedulously assessing available marriage material for her daughter, and finding it lacking, Disraeli reveals the same sense of irony as Jane Austen employed in the Bingley’s, Bennet’s and Lady de Bourgh’s preoccupation with suitable matches.

We are reminded in *Tancred* of the maturation process of Disraeli's heroes when we meet the Coningsbys at a dinner given by Sidonia. We are told that Harry and Edith's marriage has evolved into pragmatic "career management" from its initial "hurricane of the heart" (101), and Edith has evolved from vague cipher to become an adept at salon repartee (but rather disappointingly so, descending to coy mysteriousness over various costumes for an upcoming masque). Coningsby, from whom we had expected great things at the conclusion of the first volume of the trilogy, has seemingly descended from Young England principles to the expediency of smoke-filled-room manipulation (104). The Egremonts, too, have acclimated themselves to the ranks of Parliament, evidently without causing even a ripple—let alone any sea-change—in the accustomed workings of government.

The failure of these two heroes—Coningsby to alter the shape of government through his leadership, and Egremont to alleviate the condition of the worker—anticipates the similar failure of Tancred to effect any change in the Church's role of ameliorating the moral condition of England. In pointing out the inadequacies of the Church as a spiritual agent as justification for his crusade, Tancred sees that England is "too rich to risk much change" (73); the resulting complacency of the Church and its focus on only the material are strikingly portrayed in the character of the bishop, who is employed by the Duchess to dissuade Tancred from his journey. This prelate is portrayed as an adept of ecclesiastical politics and "not ill-adapted to an eminent station in an age like the present" (73). He exemplifies the qualifications necessary for success in the present age, for to

Find a man who, totally destitute of genius, possesses nevertheless considerable talents; who has official aptitude, a volubility of routine rhetoric, great perseverance, a love of affairs; who, embarrassed neither by the principles of the philosopher not by the prejudices of the bigot, can assume, with a cautious

facility, the prevalent tone, and disembarass himself of it with a dexterous ambiguity, the moment it ceases to be predominant; recommending himself to the innovator by his approbation of change 'in the abstract,' and to the conservative by his prudential and practical respect for that which is established; such a man, though he be one of an essentially small mind, though his intellectual qualities be less than moderate, with feeble powers of thought, no imagination, contracted sympathies, and a most loose public morality; such a man is the individual whom kings and parliaments would select. (73)

This characterization also fits the scheming Fakredeem whom Tancred meets in Syria, but here the encounter with the bishop concludes with an reaffirmation of the lack of spirituality in the modern industrial country. When the bishop tries to propitiate Tancred with the thought that at least there would soon be a bishop at Manchester, Tancred maintains his dissatisfaction, for he wants "to see an angel at Manchester" rather than another bureaucrat (74).

At the unsuccessful conclusion of this interview, Disraeli lightens the plaintive mood with a humorous description of the duchess's reaction to it. She is disillusioned with the bishop, misgivings of whom "she had chosen . . . should not occur to her recollection until he failed in convincing her son . . ." (75). Disraeli's admiring attitude toward women is again in evidence in *Tancred*, for the portrait of the duchess is more fully fleshed out, wryly, by a description of her as an intelligent woman, "something of a politician," with the ability to speak, "occasionally with all the profundity of a theologian" (78-9). The additional portraits of Lady Constance Rawleigh and Lady Bertie and Bellair continue the vein of sympathetic observation which Disraeli consistently brought to women, but they are now tinged with irony in implicating that scientific doctrine and Dutch financing which Disraeli abhorred. The more cynical picture of them in comparison to the ideal visions presented of Edith Millbank and Sybil parallels the shift in the

depiction of Disraeli's heroes, from the optimism of Coningsby or the more mature but yet hopeful outlook of Egremont to Tancred's increasing dubiety.

The two ladies are introduced when the duchess resorts to Lord Eskdale's pragmatic solution to derail Tancred's looming departure to the Holy Land: to send him to London, where he will forget religious ideals after he has had a taste of Capitalism (81). Lady Bertie and Bellair appears in a broken-down carriage at Sidonia's doorstep to lure our hero from his mission by professing a sympathy with his goal and commiserating with him, for "The spiritual can alone satisfy me" (131); she is only derailed when her finances collapse over railway speculation and she is revealed as "the most inveterate female gambler in Europe" (165). The well-read Lady Constance also looms as a decoy, but during an exchange with Tancred makes the mistake of offering him the book, *The Revelations of Chaos*, which she refers to as explaining everything because it treats its subject scientifically. Then she continues,

But what is most interesting, is the way in which man has been developed. You know, all is development. The principle is perpetually going on. First, there was nothing, then there was something; then, I forget the next, I think there were shells, then fishes; then we came, let me see, did we come next? Never mind that; we came at last. And the next change there will be something very superior to us, something with wings. Ah! that's it; we were fishes, and I believe we shall be crows. (109)

Tancred replies rather curtly that he does not believe he was ever a fish, and Lady Constance is summarily crossed off the list of potential deterrents to the crusade. Questioning the progress that science appears to offer, Tancred also takes to task the scientific acquirements of modern culture, exclaiming that Europe "has mistaken comfort for civilization" (227). In a reverie of thoughts, Tancred considers "his dissatisfaction with that social system; his conviction of the growing

melancholy of enlightened Europe veiled, as it may be, with sometimes a conceited bustle, sometimes a desperate shipwreck gaiety, sometimes with all the exciting empiricism of science. . .” (270).

When Tancred maintains his resolve to go to Jerusalem, Lord Eskdale assures the duchess that the trip to the East is not nearly as dangerous as of yore for the annuity offices had raised their rates. He pragmatically adds that it was “better than going to the Jews,” which, while revealing Disraeli’s ability to joke at his own expense, is quite ironic considering the further purpose of *Tancred*, “the vaunting of the Jewish race” (Smith 101). In his testament to the crucial role of the Jews in history, Disraeli forwards, according to Paul Smith, “a set of opinions calculated to outrage, when they did not merely bewilder, almost every man on the Protectionist benches” (85). This includes the idea that Christians have Jews to thank rather than persecute for the Atonement: “without the apparent agency of a Hebrew prince, the human race could not have been saved” (195). In 1847, the same year as *Tancred* was published, Disraeli would also stand for these opinions in Parliament in the debate over the Jewish Disabilities Act.

In moving from Parliament to the Holy Land, Tancred eschews the verbal battlefield to fight more clear-cut literal battles in the deserts of Syria. That opportunity which heroic character requires has not been provided to Coningsby or Egremont by Parliament. The occasion for it, indeed, appears quite serendipitous, dependent on the “effect of circumstances at a certain time of life, as well as on the impulse of a natural bent” (88), and Tancred is given an alternate field of action since government has not answered. Contemplating the fates of Napoleon and Mohammed, Disraeli extracts the moral, “never lose an occasion. Opportunity is more powerful even than conquerors and prophets” (378). Tancred remains subject to this tenuous confluence of right time with his genius, seemingly dependent on sheer chance, as Baroni recognizes when he encourages Tancred after his kidnapping with a blithe, “Something always turns up” (255).

What turns up is the Jewish princess, Eva, and, as well as rescuing Tancred from the kidnap plot, it is she who presents Disraeli's arguments in favor of Jewish ascendancy and mocks the blame ascribed them by Christians. She appears as the most intellectual of Disraeli's heroines according to Frietzsche (46), represented as having a "clear sagacious intellect," which is able to analyze "with marvelous facility" the motives of her foster-brother, the devious Fakredeen (297). To Tancred, "... with her inspired brow, her cheek slightly flushed, her undulating figure, her eye proud of its dominion over the beautiful animal which moved its head with haughty satisfaction at its destiny, Eva seemed the impersonation of some young classic hero going forth to conquer a world" (313). But an equally tantalizing woman is introduced in the figure of Astarte, Queen of the Ansarey, a tribe of Hellenists discovered in the mountain fastnesses of Syria who continue to worship Phoebus Apollo (426). Not only does she embody the power, command, and brilliancy of most of Disraeli's female characters, she blatantly appeals to Fakredeen via her sexual attractions (431).

The tolerance and respect with which Tancred greets the various forms of worship in Syria—the Jewishness of Eva, and the "antique theogony" of the Ansarey with their pagan statues—give rise to contemplation of Disraeli's true religious feelings (431). Blake maintains that *Tancred* does not succeed, in part, because Disraeli has none (214); Maurois speculates on an all-round willingness to embrace any religious sect; and the Earl of Stanley, Lord Derby, notes in his diary that Disraeli privately ridiculed all religious creeds (Vincent 179). Similarly, Fakredeen seems perfectly willing to adopt the Ansarey's ancient Hellenic religion, accepting Mount Olympus as the equal of Mount Sinai and Mount Calvary (432), if it gained his objective. Acknowledging the many religions of the region, which included Christians, Moslemin [sic], Jews and Pagans, he remarks, "'Faith,' as if his ear had caught the word for the first time, 'Faith! That is a grand idea. If one could only have faith in something and conquer the world!'" (259).

Despite Tancred's trek to Sinai to find it, Fakredeen wonders "how we in Syria could possibly manage to have faith in anything?" (259). For Fakredeen—and Disraeli—it appears that all those gods are pretty much the same.

There are many connections between Fakredeen and Disraeli in the text. Jane Ridley sees in Fakredeen a caricature of Disraeli himself (343); and certainly Fakredeen's ascribing of "Youth and Debt" (207) as providing the "two greatest stimulants in the world" has an autobiographical ring to it. Fakredeen muses that he "was fond of his debts; they were the source indeed of his only real excitement, and he was grateful to them for their stirring powers" (370), calling them his "dear companions" (371). By his management of them, he had mastered the art of negotiation and endurance and "disciplined that diplomatic ability that shall some day confound and control cabinets" (372). As Disraeli professed a desire to "act what I write," his character, Fakredeen, conveys "the thirst for action . . . to astonish Europe . . . and to use his genius in baffling and controlling . . . thrones" (370). Many such details used to describe Fakredeen are attributes mentioned by biographers in connection to Disraeli himself: "His restless, intriguing, and imaginative spirit reveled in the incognito. He was perpetually in masquerade . . . lost in the mazes of some fantastic plot" (370). If only the Conservative Party members had realized they were led by a mind schooled by juggling debts among loan sharks and enthralled by subterfuge . . . but perhaps they suspected.

As testament to the wit that frequently crops up in Disraeli's work, the humorous leavening of *The New Crusade* is furthered by Tancred's two English attendants, Trueman and Freeman, and gives testimony for Leslie Stephen's regret that Disraeli devoted himself to politics instead of novel writing. In a tone that smacks of the duo Daniel Dravot and Peachy Carnehan in Kipling's *The Man who would be King*, Disraeli illustrates the superiority with which the uneducated Englishman abroad exhibits a "pride and perverseness peculiarly British" (251).

However, that they were not preoccupied with the spiritual purpose of their chief is revealed in the conversation between these two:

“I know what you are thinking of, John,” said Mr. Freeman “You are thinking, if anything were to happen to either of us in this heathen land, where we should get Christian burial.”

“Lord love you, Mr. Freeman, no I wasn’t. I was thinking of a glass of ale.” (364)

Sidonia’s factotum, Baroni, is equally at sea with Tancred’s philosophy, like the aging parliamentarians in *Coningsby* were with the tenets of Young England. While Tancred complains of the lack of action in the world, “the most energetic men . . . mere busybodies, empires now governed like parishes, a great statesman no more than a vestryman. . .” we see Baroni busy himself cleaning guns, for “The subject was getting a little too deep for him” (481). This juxtaposition of light-hearted banter and wit with the mystical visitation of the angel on Mt. Sinai is particularly effective in its contrast of exalted religious sentiment with more earthy concerns (367), but serves as well to deflate the gravity of Tancred’s quest, a deflation that also testifies to this hero’s diminished stature.

That Tancred’s acuity is not infallible is evidenced soon after his arrival in the Holy Land, when he immediately becomes the ingenuous dupe of the wily, thoroughly unprincipled young Syrian emir, Fakredeen. “The credulous air of Syria was favourable to the great mystification in which Lord Montacute was an unconscious agent,” we are told, to justify his gullibility (343). Fakredeen ultimately echoes the expedient politicians of England in his various machinations to obtain power: he plays the French, English, Egyptians, Druse and the Maronites off against each other in all sorts of intrigues. To this end, he has Tancred kidnapped and held for ransom, circulating the notion that Tancred is the Queen’s brother and worth a fortune. The ploy only fails when Eva intercedes. Later, Fakredeen invites the various political factions to his

palace of Canobia to gain credibility, enhanced by Tancred's "presence [which] could only be accounted for by duties too grave for ordinary envoys, and who was understood to represent, in their fullest sense, the wealth and authority of the richest and most potent of nations" (343).

The inroads of reality on the world of Disraeli's romantic and heroic design are apparent in Eva's final words, which rue that "... all this time, we have been dreaming over an unattainable end, and the only source of deception is our own imagination" (484-85); and she concludes with a sentiment that well describes Disraeli's state of mind in 1846, that feeling is "all mixed up with intrigues and politics, and management, and baffled schemes, and cunning arts of men" (485). Published in 1847, *Tancred* was written during the '46 battle with Peel over the repeal of the Corn Laws, and the concluding passage of the novel reflects a pessimism even in the apparent success of his campaign to dethrone his party chief.

Bloomfield cites A.J.P. Taylor's observation that "Disraeli increased obstacles such as 'the great Asian mystery' for the pleasure of overcoming them" and that there was no mystery in the Eastern Question. Nevertheless, Edward Said identifies in *Orientalism* the proclivity of the Western mind to create mystery when looking in that direction. Indeed, Disraeli addresses this very question in *Tancred* when the Syrian, Hillel Besso, comments, "It seems to me your Eastern question is a great imbroglio that only exists in the cabinet of diplomatists. Why should there be any Eastern Question?" (393). Fakredeen supplies the question, framing it in simple geopolitical terms: "Who shall govern the Mediterranean?" (395). With this recognition, Disraeli's awareness of balance of power issues is clearly conveyed. Said agrees, commenting about *Tancred* that it is "an exercise in the astute political management of actual forces on actual territories" (169). The conditions in the region do set the stage for the Russo-Turkish wars and the Congress of Berlin in 1878, and Frieda Harcourt supports the importance of the region when she saw that "To look eastwards was to see the reality of Britain's imperial power" (97). England's acquiring of Cyprus

in the secret negotiations at the end of the Russo-Turkish **conflict is seen by** Maurois (323) as a fulfillment of *Tancred's* vision; for Cyprus was identified **by the Syrian counterparts** of Tadpole and Taper, Barizy and Pasqualigo, as a diplomatic pawn to **compensate England** for the putative murder of the Queen's brother (237).

As Leslie Stephen found *Coningsby* weighed down with political purpose, so *Tancred* becomes involved in a lengthy exposition of Mid-East politics, Edward Said commenting that *Tancred* fails due to "its author's perhaps over-developed knowledge of Oriental politics and the British Establishment's network of interests; Tancred's ingenuous desire to go to Jerusalem very soon mires Disraeli in ludicrously complex descriptions of how a Lebanese tribal chieftain tries to manage Druzes [sic], Muslims, Jews, and Europeans to his political advantage" (192). Disraeli explores the power play of these groups, which the Great Powers' involvement has merely tended to shake up in unintentional ways (343-8). But in this evaluation of the geopolitical situation, Speare finds in *Tancred* "the very seeds" of Disraeli's later foreign policy positions in the 1870s: the Queen's assumption of the title Empress of India as well as the question of who should govern in the Mediterranean. Speare puts it quite hyperbolically: "It is not too much to say . . . that the whole policy of British Imperialism as it was born in the mind of Disraeli . . . is to be found in its inception in this extraordinary and picturesque romance" (90). Certainly, as John Charmley notes, Disraeli's later policy was "dictated . . . by his geopolitical sensitivities" (30) which geared him to oppose the strain of English moral absolutism which (*à la* Gladstone, for instance) "pronounced itself capable of solving complex political and diplomatic problems by the application of simplistic notions of right and wrong" and had an ingrained bias against the Turks, who "were assumed decadent, licentious and barbarous, so they were obviously guilty. . ." (39, 43). For Disraeli, the Eastern Question, according to Charmley, "appealed both to his Romantic instincts and to his vision of Britain's place in the world" (15).

Speare's assessment would not receive wide support from other critics. D.R. Schwarz comments that *Tancred*, instead of functioning as any culmination of the trilogy, swerves off to a "fictional version of the Victorian spiritual autobiography," which Schwarz dubs a "ludicrous parody" of biblical heroes (99-101). Blake judges it the least successful of the three novels of the trilogy (214). And as far as affecting Disraeli's later foreign policy, Richard Shannon disputes the opinion that Disraeli had one, saying that he failed to rethink the eastern European question or the Near East and was "exceedingly short sighted," relying ". . . on solving matters by applying . . . the 'traditional policy of England,' trusting that all would come well" (270, 272). In Shannon's opinion, Disraeli never gave serious thought to policy at all, but instead ". . . for domestic policy there was the New Social Alliance. For foreign policy there was empire. Neither was to be taken that seriously" (269).

Thus, the third volume of the trilogy ends on a note of ambivalence in terms of its fictional import as well as its real political effect on Disraeli's later career. It does contain the enjoyable humor and social critique of the other two volumes, and expresses a sincere concern for the moral state of England, the denouement of the novel, a prospective union of Tancred and Eva. does not necessarily promise any good for the country and Tancred has abdicated his position in Parliament rather than challenging the status quo from it. The overriding lesson is the disaffection of the protagonist. A man of action, he is stymied from stirring up anything but desert dust.

Conclusion

In 1832, when Disraeli sought to introduce himself in his first election attempt for Parliament, he wrote of the underrated "influence of individual character," exhorting voters with the idea that "Great spirits may yet arise . . . whose destiny it may still be at the same time to maintain the glory of the Empire and to secure the happiness of the people" (Sichel 21). In his

political trilogy, Disraeli attempts to depict three such great spirits. However, the opportunity which Disraeli deemed more powerful than conquerors and prophets (378) fails to materialize, giving the lie to Carlyle's "heroic principle," that the "supremely talented individual . . . can surmount all obstacles and dominate the world" (qtd. in Davis 88). *Coningsby*, *Egremont*, and *Tancred* ultimately are not given the opportunity to act heroically: *Coningsby* is poised to do so, but by the time we meet up with him in *Tancred* he has apparently failed; *Egremont* dutifully exercises an undistinguished role in Parliament; and *Tancred* remains at loose ends, milling about Syria and vowing never to return to England. Thus, as Schwarz identifies, "The progressive dubiety implied by each successive ending shows how Disraeli gradually abandoned the optimism with which he began the Young England novels" (102).

In 1840 John Stuart Mill declared that "Every Englishman of the present day is by implication either a Benthamite or a Coleridgean" (qtd. in Wilfred Stone 3) and that this division was the essential character of the age, marking an alienation from roots in which Jung recognized a "split consciousness" and T.S. Eliot called a "dissociation of sensibility," a divorce between thought and feeling (4). Disraeli contested this split and dissociation on the side of the Coleridgeans, or "on the side of the angels," as he put it in the evolutionary debate. The Young England trilogy reads like an epic, a romantic quest for the triumph of sensibility in a rapidly transforming age. That it is a quest particularly for a solution to problems of the Victorian age follows the criteria of Voltaire for men to write about contemporary issues, for "the only person worthy of being recalled in the future is one who gives everything in the present" (Gordon 3). But an overriding sense of lost opportunity and the inability to act pervades the conclusion to the trilogy. There is a sense of failure that Parliament and the Church have failed to accommodate Disraeli's vision, and that "efficaciousness of action" is limited. There is a pessimistic but realistic acceptance that "everything arranges itself, more or less ill" (352-3). Lord Derby was

proven correct when he wrote in his diary that “real political power was not to be had in England; at best you could only a little advance or retard the progress of an inevitable movement” (Vincent 104).

In spite of the failure of the romantic goals of his heroes, Disraeli presents a valuable picture of his take on the state of government and social conditions, an elegiac perspective that in the triumph of capitalism and science we tend to forget could possibly have existed. Percy Colson is wrong when he writes in *Their Ruling Passions* that “very few modern readers, I imagine, would have the courage to wade through . . . any of Disraeli’s works” (183-4). And in deeming Disraeli’s character so elusive and complex as to leave us “hopelessly baffled,” (185) Colson pinpoints the very grounds for our continued interest, grounds which Monypenny finds provocative as well, that mystery which was “the essence of the man” (qtd. in Eldridge 3) . Colson may denigrate Disraeli’s vacillation between parties, reflected in an Oscar Wilde-like passage from the early novel, *The Young Duke*—“Am I Whig or Tory? I Forget. As for the Tories, I admire antiquity, particularly a ruin. . . . I think I am a Tory. But then the Whigs give such good dinners and are the most amusing. I think I am a Whig . . .” (qtd. in Colson 197)—but Disraeli’s willingness to criticize is amazing under the circumstances. Though *The Young Duke* was written well before Disraeli’s entry into Parliament, this type of criticism did not end with his accession to it, for the trilogy was written while its creator was in the ranks of the Conservative Party. Disraeli maintained this stream of censure while constrained, as Smith recognizes, to support the Conservative Party because his own personal power was insufficient to rise without it, in large measure due to the glass ceiling of his “race” (78-81). His perceived lack of consistency and his Wilde-like humor, admitted Blake, served Disraeli ill, because “Englishmen instinctively distrust wits and cynics, and are uneasy if they encounter irony or fancy” (766). But Blake maintains that Disraeli

had principles when he led the party and believed in them sincerely, but they were not the ‘principles’, if that word can be used at all, of Young England. It is easy to underestimate Disraeli’s innate conservatism. He believed passionately in the greatness of England—not in itself a Tory monopoly. But he also believed no less deeply that England’s greatness depended upon the ascendancy of the landed class. All the rest was ‘leather and prunella’. (762)

However, Disraeli’s vision of England in his fiction was as nostalgically out of touch with reality as that Ferguson describes characteristic of expatriate Anglo-Indians: A “romantic vision of an unchanging rural England, of squires and parsons, thatched cottages and for-lock tugging villagers. It was an essentially Tory vision of a traditional, hierarchical society, ruled by landed aristocrats in a spirit of benign paternalism” (203). Disraeli’s own father would warn that “invention and imagination are not the qualities for a representative of our modern patriots” but Disraeli “had to the full that sense of the dramatic” (Colson 199) that Blake describes as anathema to the average Englishman.

J. H. Plumb, in his introduction to Richard Davis’s *Disraeli*, cites Disraeli’s opportunism in politics and finds he never developed a coherent philosophy but would co-opt that of his opponents’ when necessary, as in ’67 when, since Reform would not die, Disraeli took the lead in it and attempted to turn it to the benefit of the Conservative Party (xi). Maurois, however, contradicts this view, writing that Disraeli “had remained astonishingly faithful to his ideas of youth, and his programme of 1880 might well have been signed by Coningsby” (352). The ’67 Reform Bill symbolically sounds the end note for the political trilogy, signaling an accommodation with the Gerards and the Millbanks in political participation with the Coningsbys and the Egremonts. Gertrude Himmelfarb describes this bill as “perhaps *the* decisive

event in modern English history” for it demonstrated England’s acceptance of the democratic principle (granting the refinements of 1884, 1918 and 1928) (333).

Whether promulgated as principle or pragmatic politics, Blake recognized in the art of politics a façade “of rigid adherence to immutable principle,” which conceals “those deviations or reversals which events and responsibility so often force upon governments” (764). In this, Blake deems Disraeli an impresario, “one of the half dozen greatest [parliamentarians] in our history” (764). The comparison with a façade is again applicable, representing the showy front of adherence to romantic principle, while underneath an accommodation with practicalities, another Balance of Power issue is necessarily taking place.

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